

Meet the Washboard

Before the days of shopping malls and music stores, many folks made music with items they found around the house. My mother played a pair of spoons. Irish folks played two wooden sticks, called bones! Down South, and especially in the Cajun area of the United States, folks turned a washboard (also called, scrub-board or rub-board) into an instrument.

Make It!

Although this may not be as sturdy as a good old-fashioned washboard used to clean the family's clothes, you can still make a simple rub-board from a heavy piece of cardboard (like from the back of a tablet of paper), a manilla file folder, a stapler and a handful of rubber bands. Along with these items, you'll probably want some plastic spoons or unsharpened pencils to use as scrapers as well.

First, take your manilla file folder and cut off the uneven edges. Then begin to fold it as if you were making a fan, creasing the manilla paper back and forth. Then open it up and cut it to fit on your cardboard. Staple the top and bottom edges firmly leaving room for the ridges to stick out. Next, place the rubber bands in each ridge to secure the washboard area in place. You may wish to personalize your rub-board with the child's name (this is great as a classroom activity) and then - go ahead and play!

How to Play a Washboard

In Cajun country, the washboard is most often played with thimbles placed on your right or right and left hands. If you don't have thimbles or find them hard to hold (they are slippery!), I recommend plastic spoons or forks or sporks as they sound good and are much easier to hold. You can also try playing with a chopstick, an unsharpened pencil a plastic hair pick or an egg whisk. Each will make a slightly different sound.

Play It!

Making Rhythms ... Try playing by rubbing down the washboard, rubbing up the washboard, or tapping the top or bottom of the board with your thimbles or spoons. Then mix up the sounds. For instance you can play this pattern and it works really well with the song "Oh Susannah". Have fun! Slide down – slide up – slide down (repeat). Once you get the hang of it, start making up your own patterns, or play along to your favorite songs. You will sound terrific in no time at all! Here are some other songs that are perfect to play along with: *This Land is Your Land*, *This Little Light of Mine*, *You Are My Sunshine*, *Be Kind To Your Web-Footed Friends*, and *Little Liza Jane*.

